very evening. She also asked Poopendyke later on.

The next day I was very busy, preparing for the journey by motor to the small station down the line where I was to meet Mrs. Titus and her sons. In order to avoid suspicion, I rented a big German touring car for a whole month, paying down three hundred dollars in advance.

One evening I was considerably surprised when at least a dozen brand new trunks were delivered at my landing stage. They turned out to be the property of Mrs. Titus, expressed from some vague city in the north of Germany. They all bore the name "Smart, U. S. A.," painted in large white letters on each end, and I was given to understand that they belonged to my own dear mother—who at that moment, I am convinced, was sitting down to luncheon in the Adirondacks.

I set forth with Britton at nine o'clock, in a drizzling rain. This increased to a steady downpour by half-past nine, and half an hour later the very floodgates of Heaven opened wide and let loose all the dammed waters of July and August and perhaps some that were being saved up for the approaching September. I have never known it to rain so hard as it did on that particular Thursday night, nor have I ever ceased reviling the fate that instituted, on the very next day, a second season of drought that lasted for nearly six weeks.

But we went bravely through that terrible storm, Britton and I and the vehement Mercedes, up hill and down, over ruts and rocks, across bridges and under them, sozzling and swishing and splashing in the path of great white lights that rushed ahead of us through the gloom. At half past eleven o'clock we were skidding over the cobblestones of the darkest streets I have ever known, careening like a drunken sailor but not half so surely, headed for the station, to which we had been directed by an object in a raincoat who must have been a policeman but looked more like a hydrant.

CHAPTER XV. I Traverse the Night

WE were drenched to the skin and bespattered with mud; cold and cheerless, but full of a grim excitement. Across the street from the small, poorly lighted railway station there was an eating house. Leaving the car in the shelter of a freight shed, we sloshed through the slimy rivulet that raced between the curbs and entered the clean, unpretentious little restaurant.

At half-past twelve the train from Munich drew up at the station, panted awhile in evident disdain, and then moved on. A single passenger alighted, a man with a bass viol. There was no sign of the Tituses.

Here was a pretty pass! Britton, however, had the rather preposterous idea that there might be another train a little later on. It did not seem at all likely; but we made inquiries of the station agent. There was a late train, with connections from the north, arriving in half an hour. It was, however, an hour late.

"Do you mean that it will arrive at two o'clock?" I demanded in dismay.

"No, no!" said the guard. "It will arrive at one; but not until two. It is late, *Mein Herr*."

We dozed in the little waiting room for what I consider to be the longest hour I've ever known, and then hunted up the guard once more. He blandly informed me that it was still an hour late.

"An hour from now?" I asked.

"An hour from two," said he pityingly.

Just ten minutes before three the obliging guard came in and roused us from a mild sleep.

"The train is coming, *Mein Herr*."

"Thank God!"

"But I neglected to mention that it is an express and never stops here."

It was with the greatest difficulty that I restrained a mad, devilish impulse to strike that guard full upon the nose.

The whistle of the locomotive reached us at that instant. A look of wonder sprang into his eyes.

"It—it is going to stop, *Mein Herr*," he cried. *"Gott in Himmel!* It has never stopped before."

He rushed out upon the platform in a state of great agitation, and we trailed along behind, even more excited than he.

The brakes creaked, the wheels grated, and at last the train came to a standstill. Up and down the line of coaches we raced. A conductor stepped down from the last coach but one, and prepared to assist a passenger to alight. I hastened up to him.

"Permit me," I said, elbowing him aside.

A portly lady squeezed through the vestibule and felt her way carefully down the steps. Behind her was a smallish, bewhiskered man trying to raise an umbrella inside the narrow corridor.

She came down into my arms with the limpness of one who is accustomed to such attentions, and then wheeled instantly upon the futile individual on the steps above.

"Quick! My hat! Heaven preserve us, how it rains!" she cried in a deep, wheezy voice and—in German!

"Moth—" I began insinuatingly; but the sacred word died unfinished on my lips. The next instant I was scurrying down the platform to where I saw Britton standing.

"Have you seen them?" I shouted wildly.

"No, Sir. Not a sign, Sir."

The large lady and the smallish man passed us on the way to shelter, the latter holding an umbrella over her hat with one hand and lugging a heavy hamper in the other. They were both exclaiming in German. The station guard and the conductor were bowing and scraping in their wake, both carrying boxes and bundles. A moment later the train was under way.

Once more I swooped down upon the guard. He was stuffing the large German lady into a small, lopsided carriage, the driver of which was taking off his cap and putting it on again after the manner of a mechanical toy.

"Go away!" hissed the guard angrily. "This is the Mayor and the Mayoress! Stand aside!"

Presently the Mayor and the Mayoress were snugly stowed away in the creaking hack, and it rattled away over the cobblestones.

"When does the next train get in?" I asked for the third time. He was still bowing after the departing hack.

"Eh? The next? Oh, *Mein Herr*, is it you?"

"Yes, it is still I. Is there another train soon?"

"That was Mayor Berg and his wife," he said, taking off his cap again in a sort of ecstasy. "The express stops for him, eh? Ha! It stops for no one else but our good Mayor. When he commands it to stop, it stops!"

"Answer my question," I thundered, "or I shall report you to the Mayor!"

"Ach, Gott!" he gasped. "There is no train until nine o'clock in the morning. Nine, *Mein Herr*."

"Ach, Gott!" groaned I. "Are you sure?"

"Jah! You can go home now and go to bed, Sir. There will be no train until nine, and I will not be on duty then. Goodnight!"

BRITTON led me into the waiting room, where I sat down and glared at him as if he was to blame for everything connected with our present plight.

"I dare say we'd better be starting 'ome, Sir," said he timidly. "Something 'as gone wrong with the plans, I fear. They did not come, Sir."

"Do you think I am blind?" I roared.

"Not at all, Sir," he said in haste, taking a step or two backward.

Inquiries at the little eating house only served to verify the report of the station guard. There would be no train before nine o'clock, and that was a very slow one, what we would call a "local" in the States. Moreover, it carried nothing but third-class carriages. There was not the slightest probability that the fastidious Mrs. Titus would travel by such a train; so we were forced to the conclusion that something had gone wrong with the plans. Dismally we prepared for the long drive home.

At last we were off, Britton at the wheel. I shall not describe that diabolical trip home. It is necessary only to say that we first lost our way and went six or eight miles in the wrong direction; then we had a blowout, and no quick-detachable rim; subsequently something went wrong with the mud-caked machinery, and my unfortunate valet had to lie on his back in a puddle for half an hour. Eventually we sneaked into the garage with our trembling Mercedes, and quarreled manfully with the men who had to wash her.

"Great Heaven, Britton! Poopendyke!" I exclaimed, aghast, stopping short in my sloshy progress down the narrow street that led to the ferry. "I have just thought of him. The poor devil has been waiting for us three miles up the river since midnight!"

"No such luck, Sir," said he grumpily.

"Luck! You heartless rascal! What do you mean by that?"

"I beg pardon, Sir. I mean to say he could sit in the boat'ouse and twiddle 'is thumbs at the elements, Sir. Trust Mr. Poopendyke to keep out of the rain!"

"In any event, he is still waiting there for us, wet or dry, he and the two big Schmicks. We must telephone to the castle and have Hawkes send Conrad out with word to them." I looked at my watch. It was twenty minutes past seven. "I suppose no one in the castle went to bed last night. Good Lord! what a scene for a farce!"

We retraced our steps to the garage, where Britton went to the telephone. I stood in the doorway of the building, staring out gloomily, hollow eyed.

The excitement in Britton's usually imperturbable countenance as he came running up to me from the telephone closet prepared me in a way for the startling news that was to come.

"I had Mr. Poopendyke himself on the wire, Sir. What do you think, Sir?"

A premonition! "She—she has arrived?" I demanded dully.

He nodded. "She 'as, Sir. Mrs.—your mother, Sir, is in your midst. She arrived by special train at twelve lawst night, Sir."

I was speechless. The brilliant morning sunshine seemed to be turning into somber night before my eyes; everything was going black.

"She's asleep, he says, and doesn't want to be disturbed till noon; so he says he can't say anything more just now over the telephone because he's afraid of waking 'er. She 'appens to be sleeping in your bed, Sir, he says."

"In my bed? Good Heavens, Britton! What's to become of me?"

"Don't take it so 'ard, Sir," he made haste to say. "Blatchford 'as fixed a place for you on the couch in your study, Sir. It's all very snug, Sir."

"By special train," I mumbled. A light broke in upon my reviving intellect. "Why, it was the train that went through at a mile a minute while we were in the coffee house! No wonder we didn't meet her!"

"I shudder to think of w'at would 'ave 'appened if we had, Sir," said he. "Mr. Poopendyke says the Countess 'as been up all night worrying about you, Sir. She wanted 'im to go out and search for you at four o'clock this morning; but he says he assured 'er you'd turn up all right. He says Mrs.—the elderly lady, begging your pardon, Sir—thought she was doing for the best when she took a special. She wanted to save us all the trouble she could. He says she was very much distressed by our failure to 'ave someone meet her with a launch when she got here last night, Sir. As it was, she didn't reach the castle until nearly one, and she looked like a drowned rat when she got there, being hex—exposed to a beastly rainstorm. She went to bed in a dreadful state, he says; but he thinks she'll be more pleasant before the day is over."

POOPENDYKE met us on the town side of the river. He seemed a trifle haggard, I thought. He was not slow, on the other hand, to announce in horror-stricken tones that I looked like a ghost.

"You must get those wet clothes off at once, Mr. Smart, and go to bed with a hot water bottle and ten grains of quinine. You'll be very ill if you don't. Put a lot more elbow grease into those oars, Max. Get a move on you! Do you want Mr. Smart to die of pneumonia?"

While we were crossing the muddy river my secretary, his teeth chattering with cold and excitement combined, related the story of the night.

"We were just starting off for the boathouse up the river, according to plans, Max and Rudolph and I with the two boats, when the Countess came down in a mackintosh and a pair of gumboots and insisted upon going along with us. She said it wasn't fair to make you do all the work, and all that sort of thing. While we were arguing with her we heard someone shouting on the opposite side of the river. The Countess insisted that there had been an accident and that you were hurt, Mr. Smart, and nothing would do but we must send Max and Rudolph over to see what the trouble was.

"To make the story short, Mrs. Titus and her sons were over there, huddled under the eaves of the wharf building, with absolutely no means of crossing the river. Everything was closed and locked up for the night. It took two trips over to fetch the whole party across. Raining pitchforks all the time, you understand. Mrs. Titus was foaming at the mouth because you don't own a yacht, or at least a launch with a canopy top or a limousine body, or something of the sort.

"The Countess tried to get her upstairs in the east wing; but she wouldn't climb another step. She had had to climb the hill in mud six inches deep. The Schmicks carried her the last half of the distance. She insisted on sleeping in the hall or the study: anywhere but upstairs. I assumed the responsibility of putting her in your bed, Sir. One of her sons occupies my bed. The elder son went upstairs with the Countess. She gave up her bed to him, and then she and I sat up all night in the study waiting for a telephone message from you.

"The younger son explained a good many things to us that his mother absolutely refused to discuss, she was so mad when she got here. It seems she took it into her head at the last minute to charter a special train; but forgot to notify us of the switch in the plans. She traveled by the regular train from Paris to some place along the line, where she got out and waited for the special which was following along behind. Her idea was to throw a couple of plain-clothes men off the track, and, by George, Sir! she succeeded. They thought she was changing from the train for some place in Switzerland, and went off to watch the other station. Then she sneaked aboard the special, which was chartered clear through to Vienna. She got off at this place, and—well, we have her with us, Sir, as snug as a bug in a rug."

"What is she like, Fred?" I inquired.

"I have never seen a wet hen; but I should say, on a guess, that she's a good bit like one. Perhaps when she's thoroughly dried out she may not be so bad; but—" he drew a long, deep breath,—"but, upon my word of honor, she was the limit last night! Of course one couldn't expect her to be exactly gracious, with her hair plastered over her face and her hat spoiled and her clothes soaked; but there was really no excuse for some of the things she said to me. I shall overlook them for your sake and for the Countess's." He was painfully red in the face.

We were halfway up the slope when he announced nervously that all my dry clothing was in the closet off my bedroom and could not be got at in any circumstance. "But," he said, "I have laid out my best frock coat and trousers for you, and a complete change of linen. I think if you take a couple of rolls at the bottom of the trousers they'll be presentable."

I HAD a secret hope that the Countess would be in the courtyard to welcome me; but I was disappointed. Old Gretel met me and wept over me, as if I was not already sufficiently moist. The chef came running out to say that breakfast would be ready when I desired it. Blatchford felt of my coat sleeve and told me that I was quite wet. Hawkes had two large, steaming toddies waiting for us in the vestibule, apparently fearing that we could get no farther without the aid of a stimulant. But there was no sign of a single Titus.

Later I ventured forth in Poopendyke's best suit of clothes, the one he uses when he passes the plate on Sundays in faraway Yonkers. It smelled of mothballs; but it was gloriously dry. We sneaked down the corridor past my own bedroom door and stole into the study.

Just inside the door I stopped in amazement. The Countess was sound asleep in my big armchair, a forlorn but lovely thing in a pink peignoir. Her rumpled brown hair nestled in the angle of the chair; her hands drooped listlessly at her sides; her dark lashes lay on the soft white cheeks; her lips were parted ever so slightly; and her bosom rose and fell in the long swell of perfect repose.

Poopendyke clutched me by the arm and drew me toward the door, or I might have stood there transfixed for Heaven knows how long.

"She's asleep!" he whispered.

It was the second time in twelve hours that someone had intimated that I was blind.

CHAPTER XVI. I Indulge in Plain Language

THE door creaked villainously. The gaunt, ecclesiastical tails of my borrowed frock coat were on the verge of being safely outside with me, when she cried

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